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THE SOCIAL OPTIMISM OF FAITH IN A DIVINE JESUS

The deity of Christ is not a matter of widespread discussion among sociologists! "Modern men" regard the matter as one of those highly metaphysical, impractical questions which used to be discussed several hundred years ago. As it cannot be reduced to statistics they pass it by.

Even among theologians the deity of Christ is often treated as a sort of shibboleth. The man who believes in it is orthodox and the man who does not believe in it is not orthodox. What easier way of labeling people could there be?

Even when a modern evangelical body draws up its creed it expresses itself so euphemistically as not to hurt anybody's theological feelings.



Suppose, however, we take the matter out from the region of philosophy and put it into the region of religion. That will save us from barren word-struggles.

There is an easy question by which one can test his attitude toward Jesus: Do I really believe that he is able to save the world—not merely rescue men from the world?

Rescue is not Christ's program. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. Do those who insist upon the metaphysical deity of Christ really believe that?

A boy may rescue a child from a flood, but he cannot save the neighborhood from being inundated. Many Christians seem to have no more confidence in the power of Jesus than that. Society is hopeless even for Jesus. God must burn up civilization before Jesus can establish here a new social order. Is not that to doubt

the deity of Christ? The only way for God to save the world is to transform it into the Kingdom of God. If Jesus has not the power to do this, he may be an excellent speculator on social questions and individual morals, but it is idle to speak of his Deity. The world has beaten him. At the best in the place of a triumphant spirituality we have the triumph of material forces, fire and earthquake.

Can any intelligent person believe that that is the way God works in the realm of human affairs? Look at our social situation frankly and truthfully. Can it be transformed by the power of brute force? They that draw the sword shall perish by the sword. A God who is a spirit cannot rely upon any but spiritual forces to save spiritual values. The only salvation possible is a spiritual regeneration. That is the heart of the gospel.

If a man believes that the gospel of Jesus Christ is capable of producing this spiritual change in human affairs, he has set to his seal that he believes not only in God but in God personally revealed in Jesus. He may be confused about the metaphysics of the process of this revelation, but he does something more than merely assent to formulas drawn up by people who have been dead many hundred years.

He trusts in the power of his Master.

Instead of merely believing something *about* Jesus, however important that may be, he believes *in* Jesus. He believes that the world can be saved because the power exercised by Jesus is the divine power—"the finger of God" as Jesus says—and that the program of Christianity is not superimposed upon the world by priests and theologians, but that it grows up out of a divine mind forever active and spiritually supreme. He sees new meaning in every expression of the New Testament which testifies to the superhuman power of his Master.

Inevitably he shares in the optimism and courage of his Master.

That is the sort of evangelicalism the world needs—not a hair-splitting, definition-making, shibboleth-constructing, label-attaching ecclesiasticalism, but a supreme confidence in Jesus as the One through whom God is actually at work in our world. And therefore he must win. Through him and all that he teaches, society can be transformed into the Kingdom of God.